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Contacts: Don Shipley – 202/289-2001; 571/212-7492 (cell)
Johanna Spangenberg – 202/289-2001; 571/217-5598 (cell)
Dominic Clark – 702/735-7123; 702/682-9937

DARPA Grand Challenge Offers a Host of Story Lines

Desert Field Test for Autonomous Robotic Ground Vehicles Includes Variety of Media Coverage Opportunities

Arlington, VA – Twenty-five teams from a variety of backgrounds, organizations and areas of the country have been invited by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to compete in the DARPA Grand Challenge, a week-long field test for autonomous robotic ground vehicles set to take place March 8-13, 2004 between Los Angeles, Calif. and Las Vegas, Nev.

A fully staffed media operation will help reporters, TV crews and photographers cover all of the Grand Challenge events, and dedicated access points will give credentialed members of the media a first-hand look at the proceedings. DARPA also will provide pool video footage and still photography of the event for interested print and broadcast media outlets. Members of the media are strongly encouraged to register in advance by visiting the media section of www.darpa.mil/grandchallenge, the web site that serves as a continually updated gateway for news on how to cover the event. DARPA cannot guarantee access to events for media outlets that do not register in advance.

The Grand Challenge will start with a qualification, inspection and demonstration (QID) event March 8-12, 2004 at California Speedway in Fontana, Calif., where teams will undergo a series of tests to determine the ability of systems to autonomously navigate and avoid obstacles, as well as a thorough inspection to ensure that they meet safety and performance requirements. The QID will offer members of the media the best opportunity for first-hand contact with Grand Challenge organizers, team leaders and vehicles, as well as an excellent close-up view of the vehicles and their autonomous capabilities. At the conclusion of the QID event, DARPA will announce the final field of teams that will compete in the Grand Challenge.

Teams that make the final field after the QID event will then be required to navigate a course from Barstow, Calif. to Primm, Nev. on Saturday, March 13, 2004. The course covers approximately 200 miles of off- and on-road terrain that will be cleared of non-participating vehicles. Competitors' entries must be unmanned, autonomous ground vehicles that cannot be remotely driven. Boundaries define the course, and vehicles that go outside of them will be disqualified. Each vehicle will be trailed on the course by a manned control vehicle equipped with an emergency stop system to prevent collisions and other unsafe situations.

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The first media coverage opportunities on the day of the Grand Challenge main event will be at the starting line area in Barstow, Calif. at the Slash X Café, and at the finish area behind Buffalo Bill's in Primm, Nev. Events in Barstow will start with a 4:00 a.m. media registration, a 5:00 a.m. press briefing and a 6:00 a.m. kick-off ceremony leading up to vehicle departures that take place every five minutes beginning at 6:30 a.m. In Primm, media registration will begin at 6:00 a.m., and a live satellite feed of the entire Grand Challenge start will be projected on a large screen in the Star of the Desert Arena adjoining Buffalo Bill's Resort.

DARPA strongly encourages media at the starting area in Barstow to travel directly to the finish area in Primm if they plan to continue covering the Grand Challenge throughout the day. The finish area is headquarters for the Grand Challenge command center, and it will include a complete media center that will provide reporters with the most up-to-date information on the event. There will be no media access points along the route other than those in the start and finish areas. Details on the exact locations of media access areas will be released on the morning of the Grand Challenge.

Following a finish line news conference, teams and spectators will gather for a post-Grand Challenge celebration at the Star of the Desert Arena in Primm. During a dinner ceremony at 6:30 on Sunday, March 14 at the Primm Valley Resort, DARPA will award a cash prize of \$1 million to the winner, the team that most quickly completes the course in less than the prescribed 10-hour time limit. The dinner ceremony will be open to members of the media who have purchased tickets, and will be followed by a press briefing.

DARPA is the central research and development organization for the U.S. Department of Defense. The Agency manages and directs basic and applied research and development projects for the Department of Defense, and pursues research and technology where the risk and payoff are both very high and where success may provide dramatic advances for traditional military roles and missions.

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